United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Regional Administrator
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

Region 9, Arizona, California
Hawaii, Nevada, Guam
American Samoa,
Northern Marianas Islands

EPA Environmental News

For Immediate Release: June --, 2008
Media Contact: Mary Simms, 415-947-4270,
simms.mary@epa.gov

U.S. EPA directs cleanup of toxic PCB's at Greka site

PCB contamination threatens endangered tiger salamander habitat

SAN FRANCISCO – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has directed Greka Oil and Gas to thoroughly evaluate their Bradley 3 Island facility and develop a plan to clean up polychlorinated biphenyls at the site.

"The EPA is focused on ensuring an effective clean-up remedy for the site because PCBs are a highly toxic substance," said Daniel Meer, Chief of the Response, Planning and Assessment Branch for the Superfund Division in the EPA's Pacific Southwest region. "Greka is responsible for the PCB cleanup, and the EPA will closely monitor their performance."

During a heavy rainstorm on January 26, 2008, a power pole with three PCB contaminated transformers collapsed inside the facility and released its contents. The oil inside the transformers was contaminated with low levels of PCB's. The PCB contaminated oil mixed with rainwater and spread throughout the site, also migrating into the adjacent creek.

In the days following the release, EPA contractors collected samples of water and sediments from Greka's facility and the nearby creek. The samples indicated PCB contamination above the EPA's acceptable thresholds. The creek has also been identified as a habitat and breeding ground for the endangered tiger salamander species.

Today's order mandates investigation and cleanup remedies necessary to protect public health and welfare, and the environment. The order requires Greka to hire clean up contractors who must fully characterize the extent of PCB contamination within the facility and creek; develop a sampling plan; and remove PCB contamination from the facility and creek. As part of this agreement, Greka must submit weekly written progress reports to the EPA

PCBs released into the environment take decades to slowly degrade and are suspected carcinogens. When ingested by people or animals, PCBs are stored in the fatty tissue and then are slowly released into the blood stream. Even at low exposure levels, the concentration of PCBs in fatty tissue can accumulate to a high level. As PCBs bioaccumulate in organisms and biomagnify in the food chain, they create health hazards at all levels. The short term health hazards associated with PCB exposure for people include irritation to the eyes, nose, throat, and skin. High, acute exposures can damage the liver, and in some extreme cases, cause death.

For more information on PCBs:

Appropriate ways to manage PCBs (epa.gov/region01/enforcement/tsca/index.html#pcb)
Basic information on PCBs (epa.gov/pcb)

###